



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Norway

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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Norway is a parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy with King Harald V as the head of state. It is governed by a prime minister, cabinet, and a 165-seat Parliament (Storting) that is elected every 4 years and cannot be dissolved. Free and fair elections to the modified unicameral Parliament or Storting were held in September 2001. The judiciary is independent.

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country, which is an advanced industrial state with a mixed economy combining private and public ownership that provides a high standard of living for residents, had a population of approximately 4.5 million. The key industries were oil and gas, metals, engineering, shipbuilding, fishing, and manufacturing. The economy was characterized by low unemployment and labor shortages in many sectors.

The Government generally respected the rights of its citizens, and the law and the judiciary provided effective means of addressing individual instances of abuse.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

Prison conditions generally met international standards. Men and women were held separately. Juveniles were not held separately from adults; however, it was extremely rare for juveniles to be held in prison, and social welfare authorities generally cared for them. Pretrial detainees were held separately from convicted prisoners.

The Government permits visits by independent human rights observers, although there were no such visits during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

The national police have primary responsibility for internal security; however, in times of crisis, such as internal disorder or natural catastrophe, the police may call on the armed forces for assistance. In such circumstances, the armed forces are under police authority.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The court system consists of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court Appellate Court, superior courts, county courts for criminal cases, magistrate courts for civil cases, and claims courts. Special courts include the Impeachment Court (composed of parliamentarians), the labor court, trusteeship courts, fishery courts, and land ownership severance courts.

The law provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. Courts provided counsel to indigent persons.

There were no reports of political prisoners

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution and the law prohibit such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice; violations were subjected to effective legal sanction.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice. An independent press, an effective judiciary, and a functioning democratic political system combined to ensure freedom of speech and of the press, including academic freedom.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without government restriction.

Access to the Internet was widely available and unrestricted.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The law provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The state church is the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway, which is supported financially by the State and to which 86 percent of the population nominally belongs. The Constitution requires that the King and one-half of the Cabinet belong to this church. Public debate on the relationship between church and state continued during the year. Other denominations operated freely.

A religious community is required to register with the Government only if it desires state support, which is provided to all registered denominations on a proportional basis in accordance with membership.

The law provides that the subject "religious knowledge and education in ethics" be taught in public schools. The course covers world religions and philosophy and promotes tolerance and respect for all religious beliefs; however, based on the country's history and the importance of Christianity to society, the course devotes the most time to Christianity. All children must attend this mandatory course, and there are no exceptions for children of other faiths; students may be exempted from participating in or performing specific religious acts such as church services or

prayer, but they may not forgo instruction in the subject as a whole. Organizations for atheists as well as Muslim communities have contested the legality of forced religious teaching. Schools provided a standard form to parents to request exemptions for their children from parts of the class, and some students reportedly availed themselves of the exemption. A case brought to the European Court of Human Rights by the Norwegian Humanist Association and a group of parents contesting the law remained pending at year's end. The Norwegian Humanist Association also lodged a complaint about the law with the U.N. Human Rights Commission.

The Workers' Protection and Working Environment Act permits prospective employers to ask applicants for employment in private or religious schools and day care centers whether they will respect and teach Christian beliefs and principles.

Muslims encountered some difficulties in obtaining local permission to build mosques in areas where they were concentrated.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

c. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of refugee status or asylum to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. The Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. The Government cooperated with the office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government also provided protection to certain individuals who fell outside of the definition of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. During the year, the Government granted protective residency (which entails the granting of permanent residence permits) to 2,063 persons, including political asylum for 558 persons and asylum as U.N. quota refugees for 721 persons. Immigration authorities rejected 8,395 applications for protective residency. In addition, 9,842 persons received residency status through a family reunification program.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. Elections to the Parliament were held in September 2001; the Labor Party won 24 percent, and three other parties each won more than 10 percent of the vote. Eight parties had representation in Parliament.

Women were increasingly well represented at all levels of government. No restrictions in law or practice hindered women's participation in government and politics. There were 57 women in the 165-seat Parliament; women headed 8 of the 19 government ministries, chaired 5 of 15 standing committees in Parliament, and headed 2 of the 6 main political parties.

In addition to participating freely in the national political process, the Sami (formerly known as Lapps) elect their own constituent assembly, the Sameting. Under the law establishing the 39-seat body, the Sameting is a consultative group, which meets regularly to deal with "all matters, which in [its] opinion are of special importance to the Sami people." In practice, the Sameting has been most interested in protecting the group's language and cultural rights and in influencing decisions on resources and lands where Sami are a majority (see Section 5). A report on the activity of the Sami Assembly is submitted to Parliament annually, and every 4 years a report on the main principles of Sami policy is presented in Parliament.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were very cooperative and responsive to their views.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs oversees the human rights portfolio. Based on the principle that each cabinet minister is responsible for promoting human rights in his or her field, the Government established a separate Committee of State Secretaries responsible for ensuring that human rights issues receive political emphasis and

attention.

There is a parliamentary ombudsman for public administration who is also responsible for promoting human rights through his work on individual cases.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, disability, language, or social status, and the Government generally enforced this prohibition in practice.

Women

Societal violence against women was a problem. In 2002, there were 653 rapes reported, with 41 convictions. The police believed that increases in reported rapes and domestic abuse were due largely to greater willingness among women to report these crimes. The police investigated and prosecuted such crimes and also have instituted special programs to prevent rape and domestic violence and to counsel victims. Public and private organizations ran several shelters. Each of the country's 19 counties had a number of such shelters. In 2002, the country's shelters registered 39,500 overnight stays.

Prostitution is legal, but organized prostitution or "pimping" is illegal. The number of foreign women, in particular from Russia and the Baltic states, engaged in prostitution increased during the year.

There were reports of trafficking in women for prostitution (see Section 6.f.).

The Gender Equality Ombudsman--charged with enforcing the Gender Equality Act--processed complaints of sexual discrimination. In 2002, there were 422 complaints and 442 telephone inquiries to the Ombudsman; women filed approximately 40 percent of the complaints, men filed 30 percent, organizations filed 13 percent, and the ombudsman's office directly filed 16 percent.

An amendment to the Working Environment Act provides that "employees shall not be subjected to harassment or other unseemly behavior." Employers that violate these provisions, including the harassment clause, are subject to fines or prison sentences of up to 2 years, depending on the seriousness of the offense.

The law protects the rights of women. According to the law, "women and men engaged in the same activity shall have equal wages for work of equal value"; however, according to the equal rights ombudsman's office, which monitors enforcement of the law, women generally received 10 to 15 percent less pay and benefits than men for work of "equal value."

Children

The Government is committed strongly to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded systems of education and medical care. The Government provides free education for children through the postsecondary level. Education is compulsory for 10 years, or through the ninth grade; most children stay in school at least until the age of 18. An independent Children's Ombudsman Office, within the Ministry of Children and Families, is responsible for the protection of children under the law.

There were reports of child abuse. In 2002, a total of 738 sexual assaults by nonfamily members and 121 assaults by family members were reported.

Persons with Disabilities

There was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment, education, or in the provision of other state services. The law mandates access to public buildings for persons with disabilities, and the Government generally enforced these provisions in practice.

Indigenous People

The Government has taken steps to protect the cultural rights of the indigenous Sami by providing Sami language instruction at schools in their areas, radio and television programs broadcast or subtitled in Sami, and subsidies for

newspapers and books oriented toward the Sami (see Section 3). A deputy minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Affairs deals specifically with Sami issues. The royal family supported the Sami through their interest in Sami culture and by visiting Sami areas. A working group headed by a former chief justice started to draft a Nordic Sami Convention, which it planned to complete in 2005.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law provides workers with the right to associate freely, and workers exercised this right. With membership totaling approximately 60 percent of the workforce, unions played an important role in political and economic life, and the Government consulted them on important economic and social problems. Although the largest trade union federation was associated with the Labor Party, all unions and labor federations were free of party and government control.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination. The Labor Court deals with complaints of antiunion discrimination; however, there were no such complaints during the year.

Unions were free to form federations and to affiliate internationally; unions maintained strong ties with such international bodies as the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

All workers, including government employees and military personnel, have and exercised the right to organize and bargain collectively. Collective bargaining was widespread, and most wage earners were covered by negotiated settlements, either directly or through understandings that extend the contract terms to workers outside the main labor federation and the employers' bargaining group.

Workers have the right to strike; however, the Government has the right, with the approval of the Parliament, to invoke compulsory arbitration under certain circumstances.

There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children, and there were no reports that such practices occurred. The Directorate of Labor Inspections (DLI) is responsible for compliance with the law.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

Children 13 to 18 years of age may be employed part-time in light work that will not affect adversely their health, development, or schooling. Minimum age rules were observed in practice and enforced by the DLI.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no legislated or specified minimum wage, but wages normally fall within a national scale negotiated by labor, employers, and the Government at the local and company level. Wages increased this year by approximately 4 percent. The average income, not including extensive social benefits, provided a decent standard of living for a worker and family.

Normal working hours are mandated by law and limited to 37½ hours per week. The law also provides for 25 working days of paid leave per year (31 days for those over age 60). A 28-hour rest period is mandated legally on weekends and holidays.

The law provides for safe and physically acceptable working conditions for all employed persons. Specific standards are set by the DLI in consultation with nongovernmental experts. According to the law, environment committees composed of management, workers, and health personnel must be established in all enterprises with 50 or more workers, and safety delegates must be elected in all organizations. Workers have the right to remove themselves from situations that endanger their health. The DLI effectively monitored compliance with labor

legislation and standards.

f. Trafficking in Persons

There were reports of some women trafficked to the country.

In June, Parliament passed legislation to add a separate provision in the Penal Code prohibiting trafficking in persons. The new provision provides for a maximum sentence of 10 years and does not preclude traffickers from also being charged with violating pimping, immigration, and other laws. There were no prosecutions for such offenses during the year. However, in November, nine persons were charged in a major trafficking investigation. The investigation focused on two ethnic Russian women trafficked to the country from Lithuania via Sweden and forced to work as prostitutes in Oslo. The case remained under investigation by Swedish and Norwegian police at year's end.

In February, the Government presented a plan of action for trafficking, outlining its strategy to eradicate human trafficking. The plan classifies trafficking as a modern form of slavery, promotes cooperation between government authorities and NGOs, and allocates \$15 million (NOK 100 million) over 3 years to prevent and prosecute trafficking and protect victims.

The Ministry of Children and Family Affairs coordinates an inter-ministerial working group that is responsible for implementing trafficking resolutions and recommendations from the U.N. and the European Council. The Government's mandatory ethical guidelines for its employees prohibit the purchase and acceptance of sexual services.

The country was a destination for an unspecified but believed to be small number of women trafficked for the purpose of prostitution, particularly from Russia, Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states. There were no reports of trafficking within the country.

Victims of trafficking in the country had the same legal rights as other foreigners to apply for residency, asylum, welfare, social aid, and emergency health care. The Government, in cooperation with public services, crisis center, and NGOs, is responsible for assisting possible victims of trafficking; however, most asylum requests by victims were denied. During the year, the Government introduced a "reflection period," during which expulsion decisions concerning victims of trafficking may be suspended for 45 days with a view to providing practical assistance and counseling to the individual concerned.

Government officials increased awareness of trafficking by raising the issue in a number of speeches and fora. NGOs conducted outreach programs to provide trafficking victims with information on their legal rights and available health and other services.